DIME NOVEL DELIGHTS OF YEARS AGO IGNORED BY CHILDREN TO-DAY

Lurid Indian and Detective Stories in Which Scores Died Between Cover and Cover Give Way to Fiction of a Better Type That Is Read by Elders

WHAT are the boys and girls of nowadays reading? Blood and thunder has been tomahawked, scalped and buried beneath the haunted log cabin in the forest of oblivion these thirty years. "Bertha the Sewing Machine Girl" has finished hemming romantic ruffles on maiden imaginations. She slacked up about a quarter of a century ago—which is just as well, for she was cruelly overworked. What has taken the place of the dime novel and the weekly five cent serial where the Indian massacre and the persecuted lovelorn glued the juvenile eye to the lurid page for heart beating hours at a time?

Librarians and book publishers have been asked about it. They vary as to reasons. Some say there is a fashion in fiction for children as well as grown-ups. Others say that the admonitions of a generation ago, born of a hatred of the melodramatic publication, have borne fruit at last and that childhood is now in a healthy state as to its choice of fiction.

In fact some go so far as to say that from five to eight years of the boy's and girl's life, formerly given over to overwrought imaginings, have been cut entirely out and that we now have a new boy and girl being, who jumps from Mother Goose right into the serious reading of the elders and likes it. Be this as it may, investigation reveals and is able to chronicle exactly what youngsters read in the past and what they read now, even though the reason for the change is not plain.

About 1870, it may be said, the dime novel craze was at its height. Before then for many years the celebrated New York *Ledger*, published by Robert Bonner, had hundreds of thousands of readers who hung upon its continued stories from week to week. But these readers were well on in their teens or out of them. In the late '60s the Indian novel began to forge ahead in popularity.

If you should say that every boy between 10 and 15 years of age read a dime novel you would not be very far wrong. There were exceptions of course. Parents did their best to keep what they called "trash" out of their children's hands. Young mothers bewitched by Mrs. Southworth's stories in the *Ledger* only a few years before still tried hard to do their duty in guarding their boys and girls from overindulgence in what many termed improper fiction. But this very creditable repression only served to measure the extent of the craze. In most cases where the grownups of to-day look back on their Indian dime novel reading period they smile grimly as they recall how they planned all sorts of subterfuge to enjoy the surreptitious reading of their exciting fiction.

Novels were read by stealth. In some cases one boy of a neighborhood whose parents were not so strict as others was made the librarian. Boys frequently "chipped in" for dime novels and one book served for all, each eagerly waiting his turn to get at it. Even with parents vigorously denunciatory and watchful, boys and girls brought in the forbidden literature, hiding it in secret places from cellar to garret and seizing all sorts of odd moments and opportunities to snatch a few moments at its pages. Publishers amassed great wealth. Some of the famous publishing houses of to-day date their rise to that period.

The three great dime novel publications for a number of years were Beadle's, Munro's and Ornum's—the latter being the name Munro spelled in reverse. The Beadle novel was a book of light yellow paper cover about four and three-quarter inches wide and six inches long. The average number of pages was 100—although the very popular ones were longer. The Munro and Ornum novels were of the same size as the Beadle, but their paper covers were cream colored, illuminated with dashing and daring pictures showing hand to hand Indian and hunter battles. It was no uncommon thing for the "librarian" of the neighborhood to possess from 500 to 1,000 of these dime novels. Toward the last years of the craze local stationers set themselves up as exchangers, charging 3 cents for swapping stories boy patrons had read for those they had not.

Some of the titles of these tales were truly bloodcurdling, as it was the intent of the author and publisher they should be. And yet—and this should be well remarked—not a lurid dime novel of the "craziest" period was the instiller of an impure thought or an objectionable principle. Full of impossibilities they were, replete with bloodletting and rough border talk, but always the right triumphed and villainy was discomfited. They were grammatically put together, although graybeards might deride their objective. But in heating up the boyish imagination so that the youngster got a wrong viewpoint of life, there was the harm complained of by the critics.

Take a sample story of the Beadle dime novel days. Here is one: "Death-Notch the Destroyer, or the Spirit Lake Avengers, by Oll Coombs."

"There suddenly came the sharp report of a rifle, followed by a low cry—the unmistakable death wail. The Eight Avengers looked from one to the other inquiringly.

"'Without a doubt another accursed redskin has fallen,' said Fred Travis.

"'Yes, but who fired the shot?' asked young Hawes. 'Does the Omaha know?'

"'Does not Death-Notch, the Young Scalp Hunter, lurk within these woods?' grimly asked the friendly Indian.

"The Avengers started at the name of one they had never yet seen, yet of whom they had heard amazing reports. He was represented as being a youth of Titan proportions and power, cunning as a fox, subtle as a serpent—a deadly enemy to the human race, going and coming like one of supernatural powers and bearing the heart of a fiend. Human lives and human scalps were said to be the sole object of his search; and that upon a thousand different trees in the forest bordering the Little Sioux River might be found the totem of this mad destroyer—a notch cut with a tomahawk upon the trunk or limb of a tree, each notch representing a victim; and where the notch was found there also could be found a decaying corpse or a bleaching skeleton. No wonder, then, that the Eight Avengers started when the Friendly mentioned the name of Death-Notch. There, half concealed among the weeds and grass, lay the form of a Sioux warrior, dead and scalpless. From a deep gash in the left cheek, the warm blood was still flowing. Upon the trunk of the tree where the dead warrior lay they saw a small notch with the sap still oozing from the wound.

"'Death-Notch has been here, behold his totem,' said the Friendly.

"'Nevertheless, we must on to our work,' said Travis. 'So forward all!' In single file the Eight Avengers set off through the forest."

Lend your attention to another Beadle dime novel story of the old days that stirred many a grandfather now living. It's "The Wolf Demon, or The Queen of the Kanawha, by Albert W. Aiken."

"Desperate Boone's hand sought the handle of his knife. The bright blade flashed in the air; a second more and it would have been buried to the haft in the body of White Dog, but the Indian girl perceived her lover's peril and sprung to his aid, grasping the hand of the scout just as he was about to plunge the knife in the redman's breast.

"The red chief, taking advantage of the girl's aid, twisted his leg around that of the scout, bore Boone backward to the earth, upon which the combatants fell with a heavy shock. A second more and the Shawnee warriors surrounded the contending men. With many a cry of triumph they bound the daring paleface who had lurked so near to the Shawnee village."

And there's hundreds similar to these on the old Beadle list. You will note that the two sided story was a practical necessity to catch the boyish eye and imagination in the '70s. There was the first section, consisting of three or five words, and then the impressive "Or," after which the second title of as many words followed. And not a few had three titles, as:

"Big-Foot Wallace, or the King of the Lariat, or Wild Wolf the Waco"; "Long Beard, or Out With the Giant Spy, or Happy Harry the Wild Boy of the Woods"; "Little Hurricane, or Perils of the Boy Captain, or the Oath of the Young Avengers."

As the rage for the dime novel began to dwindle publishers and writers lashed themselves into a regular tornado of terrific titles. Some were: "Border Bullet, the Prairie Sharpshooter, or Yank Yellowbird's Black Hills Colony"; "Double Dan, the Dastard, or the Pirates of the Pecos"; "The Dude Desperado, or the Baleful Beauty of Brimstone Bar"; "Spokane Saul, the Samaritan Suspect, or the Double Twist at Camp Sahara"; "Buffalo Bill's Invincibles, or the Sable Shadower's Sublime Sacrifice"; "High-Water Mark the Sport, or Silver-Tip Sid the Dead-Center Shot," and "Yellow Gid of Dark Divide, or the Mineral Banker's Death Trump."

Probably the most popular of the real "old timer" dime novels were: "Billy Bowlegs"; "The Chief of the Miami"; "The Scout of Long Island"; "Lantern-Jawed Bob" and "Silverheels, the Delaware." There are places where they still may be "dug up" for reminiscent readers.

Girl readers were fairly "mesmerized" in these dime novel days—or say nearing the '80s—with the weekly serial stories in which the chased, hunted and persecuted maiden had her hands full surviving the temptations and perils that beset her. Of course the favorite story was the one in which the pretty little shop or factory girl married the handsome youth of high degree—preferably a nobleman—and then returned to give her old associates a strawberry and cream party on the lawn of her spacious estate. The publication that had the greatest vogue of this sort was the *Family Story Paper*. The *Fireside Companion* was another favorite. The *Saturday Night*, published in Philadelphia, and the *New York Weekly* of this city also held many thousands spellbound.

Then the stories of Mrs. Mary Jane Holmes and Mrs. May Agnes Fleming were read by sentimental girls everywhere, the former authoress publishing always in book form. Mrs. Holmes's heroines always had an attack of brain fever somewhere in the story and things happened quickly and strangely while they were out of their heads. Mrs. Fleming always had a world weary, masterful man, who quarrelled with the heroine and then finally made it up in time for the last chapter to get to press. "St. Elmo" and "East Lynne," by other authors, were prime favorites.

Two writers who had a remarkable following in the old days were William T. Adams, "Oliver Optic," and Horatio Alger, Jr. Adams wrote scores of books for boys and girls. He always declared he tried to instil the Christian spirit in his readers, but of late years his books have been taboo because of their alleged improbability. His "Lake Shore Series" appealed to thousands of boys and his "Woodville Stories" to as many of the other sex. "Ragged Dick" by Alger had its thousands of readers.

Library systems throughout the country have been so expanded that boys and girls have all kinds of opportunity to extend their reading to all sorts of books. After the decline of the rabid Indian story of the dime novel kind there came a mighty rush of detective stories. The "Old Cap Collier" class had a skyhigh run. He was a direct descendant of the "Old Sleuth" stories that ran first nearly fifty years ago in a serial weekly. Then the detective craze passed, although there are still boys who eagerly seek them.

The fact remains, however, that boys and girls are not reading tales that stamp themselves as out and out juvenile fiction the same as in the old days. This has been evidenced in the investigation recently made under the auspices of the Boy Scouts of America to ascertain what might be the best way and the best books to healthfully attract and hold the boy's attention. As a result of this investigation twenty-five books for boys were selected. These books are declared, "A guaranteed library for boys; clean, wholesome, vigorous stories that have been indorsed by a commission of the leading librarians of America. Every boy will want these books and every parent should see that he gets them."

The selection of the twenty-five books was by the regularly organized commission of the Boy Scouts, composed of George F. Bowerman, librarian, Public Library, District of Columbia; Harrison W. Graver, librarian, Carnegie Library of Pittsburg; Claude G. Leland, superintendent, Bureau of Libraries, Board of Education, New York; Edward F. Stevens, librarian, Pratt Institute Free Library, Brooklyn, and William D. Murray, George D. Pratt, Frank Presbrey and Franklin K. Mathiews of the editorial board of the Boy Scout movement.

The twenty-five books selected are "Baby Elton, Quarterback," by Leslie W. Quirk; "The Blazed Trail," by Stewart Edward White; "The Call of the Wild," by Jack London; "Cab and Caboose," by Kirk Munrow; "College Years," by Ralph D. Paine; "Crooked Trails," by Frederic Remington; "Cattle Ranch to College," by Russell Doubleday; "Buccaneers and Pirates of Our Coast," by Frank R. Stockton; "The Horsemen of the Plains," by Joseph A. Altsheler; "Jeb Hutton," by James B. Connolly "The Jester of St. Timothy's," by Arthur Stanwood Pier; "A Midshipman in the Pacific," by Cyrus Townsend Brady; "Pitching in a Pinch," by Christy Mathewson; "The Ranche on the Oxhide," by Henry Inman; "Redney McGaw," by Arthur E. McLarlane; "Three Years Behind the Guns," by Lieut. Tisdale; "Tom Paulding," by Brander Matthews; "Tommy Remington's Battle," by Burton E. Stevenson; "Jim Davis," by John Masefield; "Tecumseh's Young Braves," by Everett T. Tomlinson; "Tom Strong, Washington's Scout," by Alfred Bishop Mason; "Wells Brothers, the Young Cattle Kings," by Andy Adams; "Yankee Ships and Yankee Sailors," by James Barnes; "The Cruise of the Cachalot" and "Treasure Island," by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Report has it that thousands upon thousands of boys are reading these books and that their reading may be taken as a sure indication of present day taste. Decidedly all are not limitedly boys' books. In fact a man could read them all and not consider it time wasted. "Treasure Island" and "The Call of the Wild" are favorites of the seniors.

And this brings to mind a noteworthy fact about so-called juvenile books. Take "Robinson Crusoe." It is deemed primarily a boy's book. But it never was and never is until it is abridged and put in boy's language. It also calls forth the question what is the age when boys become possessed of the insatiable desire for fiction and romance? Is it 9 years of age? Some boys are hard fiction readers before that. In the days of the dime novel the demand for fiction reading that was understandable seemed to be met, but to the boy's detriment. As a boy gets older he will seize with avidity more mature fiction. It's the same as the grownups are reading. But are ten to twelve year old boys reading it? Reports from libraries indicate that they read with great relish the books taken out by their fifteen-year-old brothers. They are readers of the "best sellers" also.

Looks as if the dime novel boy mind had vanished into thin air. Girls the same. They read the books of their elders and cannot get new ones quickly enough. Sneering critics interviewed say that girls read nowadays even "slushier" stories than forty years ago, but inquiry at the source does not bear it out. Some girls of course still turn to the old variety. There is still a serial running that not many weeks ago published "The Ill Starred Love, or Gwendolyn Van Tuyl's Life Tragedy." Some of it runs this way:

"Gwendolyn, singing, burst into the room. Reginald Courtleigh sprang to his feet, his eyes fixed admiringly on her flushed, beautiful face. She drew back confused.

"'Pardon me, papa,' she murmured. 'I thought you were alone.'

"'Present me, Ransom,' demanded Courtleigh in an undertone. Ransom presented the man to his beautiful daughter. Gwendolyn acknowledged the civility with a slight inclination of her graceful head. When she had gone Courtleigh turned to the old millionaire.

"'Is she promised to any man?' he asked, almost in a whisper. Ransom shook his gray head. 'She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.' Ransom said nothing, but he knew intuitively what was in the other's heart. He turned coldly away.

"'I would rather see her dead and in her grave,' he muttered. A sardonic smile crept over Courtleigh's features."

In contrast to the selected text of the old time dime novel hereinbefore noted read this latterday extract from "Baby Elton, Quarterback," which is reported to reflect the taste of the average 1914 boy. It depicts a college cane rush.

"They were still tugging at it when the crowd of freshmen came in a solid mass like a bullet. Somebody weakened and let go. Somebody else's hand slipped. Everywhere were freshmen crawling under the upper classmen, scrambling over them, shoving between them.

"Elton as leader hit the crowd first. Back of him were 200 sturdy followers pent up with excitement. He went through and over a score of astonished young men. Almost before he realized it he had his hand on the precious cane. Then more freshmen came and pulled the sophomores off before the understood the sudden energy. And all at once, panting and with clothes torn, Elton found himself in possession of the cane. Some instinct told him to run. In an instant there were 500 men after him. • • •

"'Well,' gasped the other, taking his pipe from his mouth, 'who are you?'

"'I'm Elton—1904, you know. I've got the cane!'"

Librarians say that Mary Johnston's "To Have and To Hold" has always been a very strong "love book" for girls from the day of its publication up to the present hour. Not the greatest story for girls, but a fair sample of what 1914 girls like. Contrast the following extract with the Gwendolyn Van Tuyl type of text set down before.

"'With all my heart I love thee, my knight, my lover.' Her voice broke and I felt the trembling of her frame. 'I love not thy tears upon my hands,' she murmured. 'I have wandered far and am weary. Wilt rise, and put thy arm around me and lead me home?'

"I stood up and she came to my arms like a tired bird to its nest. I bent my head and kissed her upon the brow, the blueveined eyelids, the perfect lips. 'I love thee,' I said; 'the song is old, but it is sweet. See! I wear thy color, my lady.'

"The hand that had touched the ribbon upon my arm stole upward to my lips. 'An old story, but a sweet one,' she said. 'I love thee. I will always love thee. My head may lie upon thy breast but my heart lies at thy feet.'"

Of course the standard works of fiction always wer read and are being read now by a percentage of boys and girls of varying ages. This always was conceded. But there was a craze attached to the dime novel and the six cent serial that seems to have gone out, absolutely. In its place has come the desire for the book that is often as eagerly red by the seniors as the juniors. The monthly magazines too point a significant explanation. Imaginative youth has spurned the lurid. Juvenile fiction has its own fashion.

THE GREATEST MOMENTS IN A GIRL'S LIFE

By Harrison Fisher

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THE TROUSSEAU

EVEN while her heart is beating rapturously to the thrills of the betrothal kiss the girl whose dream of love has come true begins instinctively to think of the trousseau, and after she has caught her breath following the first swift, joyous month of the engagement her days are spent with the modistes, at the milliner's and in the lingerie shops, while the quiet evening hour in her boudoir before the lucky man comes to vow anew his love is devoted to a happy survey of what has been accomplished and of the many things remaining to be done before all is ready.

So many gowns are to be fitted while swift fingers mould them to the fair form. It seems as though there are endless hours of standing with delicate fabrics draped about her and with pins being deftly placed and folds patted, only to have the pins withdrawn and placed anew to make the fitting a little smoother, insuring perfection.

First there is the wedding gown, and the delicious indecision about its design and appropriateness, for it is in this that she is to be given away from maidenhood into the new happiness of her love. It is the time of times when she must look her best, the wonder picture of her life. The cunning brains of the master designers have conceived so many fascinations of dress that she dare not select until she has seen and tried all. But at last the gown is done, and her mirror flashes back what she has known all along would be its message—that the creation of costly satin and rare old lace is tenderly, girlishly becoming.

So pass quickly the days of this, one of the happiest experiences of a girl's life. Going away gown, afternoon and evening gowns, travelling suits, soft filmy, lacy, beribboned garments whose complications amaze the masculine mind, all contribute their moments of happiness in their choosing and making. And shoes must be purchased and hats and the thousand and one little things that make for trousseau entirety. The selection of hats is extremely difficult, and she turns and weaves to get the reply from the mirror at every angle and in every light.

At last the trousseau is complete and her intimate girl friends drop in and gaze enraptured at the finery spread out before them on every side and every piece of furniture. And as the happy girl holds up to view the gown in which she will go to the altar she knows that she is experiencing one of the greatest moments that can come into a girl's life. And her heart pulsates the secret that each garment—each trifle, even—that she has spent weeks garnering for her trousseau is but a link forged in the chain of her future happiness.

Alone in her room, she sits back in exquisite contentment, now patting this frock or that gown, as if it were really alive and responsive, now gazing fondly on this bit of intimate lacery, now adding a delicate personal touch here and another there, as the wedding day—the big day of her life—draws swiftly near.

Next Sunday Mr. Fisher will depict "The Wedding," the third subject in his series of pictures, "The Greatest Moments in a Girl's Life."